

BARBARA A. SIZEMORE, 76

By Chris Young and Tribune staff reporter
Chicago Tribune

•

Jul 30, 2004 at 12:00 am

When Barbara A. Sizemore was a young child in the early 1930s, some people believed that black children could not learn at the rate of white children. Her father took her to researchers at his college, where she took tests with a white child and proved that notion false, her granddaughter Kafi Chase said.

That experience helped shape her calling as an educator, especially of African-American and inner-city students. She argued that teachers were not giving these students the skills they needed to succeed in life. She believed that all children could learn, her granddaughter said.

Mrs. Sizemore, 76, died of cancer Saturday, July 24, at her home in Chicago.

Although her awards and recognitions would fill textbooks, she was most proud of the fact that everyone in four generations of her family was college-educated, beginning with her parents, her family said.

She was raised in Terre Haute, Ind., and graduated from high school at age 16. She received bachelor's and master's degrees from Northwestern University in 1947 and 1954, respectively. She earned her doctorate in educational administration at the University of Chicago in 1979.

Mrs. Sizemore began teaching in the Chicago Public Schools in 1947, the year she married her first husband, Furman Sizemore. They divorced in 1964.

In 1973, she became superintendent of Washington's public school district, making her the only black woman in the nation at that time to run a major school system. She drew critics and followers with her proposals, which included reducing administrative hierarchy, ending standardized tests and involving parents and students in educational decisions. She was fired amid controversy in 1975, a year before her contract was to end.

The University of Pittsburgh hired her to work in the Department of Black Community, Research and Education. While there, she was a professor and interim chair from 1977 to 1992, her family said. After studying the practices of high-performing schools that were predominately black and in poor neighborhoods, she created the School Achievement Structure model to improve failing schools.

She married her second husband, Jake Milliones, in 1978.

She returned to Chicago in 1992 to become dean of DePaul University's School of Education. For the next six years, she implemented the School Achievement Structure model in about 50 Chicago public schools, her daughter said.

Colleagues were amazed at her energy. Even late in her career, she worked 12 to 14 hours each day, six days a week, said Gayle Mindes, professor of education at DePaul.

Al Foster, who worked with Mrs. Sizemore on improving Chicago schools, said she was forceful and direct.

"She was the first to say, 'Why, how, and are we getting what we're supposed to get?'" said Foster, former director of school intervention in the accountability office of the Chicago Public Schools.

She was very proud of her work with the National Alliance of Black School Educators, where she was a scholar in residence from the 1970s until her death, her daughter, Kymara Chase, said.

Mrs. Sizemore authored two books and numerous journal articles and lectured around the nation. A book to be published posthumously, "Walking in Circles," describes the educational system's tendency to rediscover earlier methods, her daughter said.

Other survivors include a son Furman G. Sizemore; two stepsons, DuBois and Momar Milliones; two stepdaughters, Beatena Nance and Marimba Milliones; and seven grandchildren.

Services will be held from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Friday in Christ Universal Temple, 11901 S. Ashland Ave., Chicago.